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Summary

Neerbosch orphanage village. The orthodox Protestant orphanage, Neerbosch, and its founder Johannes van 't Lindenhout (1863-1903)

In 1863 the evangelist Johannes van 't Lindenhout founded an orphanage in a former inn in Nijmegen, an initiative that led to the formation of the largest residential institution in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth century. This research focuses on two questions, the first being: how was this orphanage able to develop into a whole orphanage 'village' with 50 hectares of ground, 41 buildings and 1100 residents in just 30 years? The second question is: how did the orthodox protestant identity of the orphanage influence Van 't Lindenhout's pedagogical criteria and his approach to the children's daily upbringing? To a large extent, Johannes van 't Lindenhout's character plays a role in answering these two questions. In order to be able to place the development of the orphanage in a historical context, the research includes comparisons with orphan care in traditional orphanages and with the development of new residential institutions and one in particular in Eefde, near Zutphen. That was Nederlandsch Mettray, a benevolent commune for boys, which gave prominence to an agricultural education.

The Neerbosch Issue

Events which occurred in 1893 and 1894 and became known as the 'Neerbosch Issue' are considered first, as they reappear several times in this book. The factor precipitating these events was a publication about Neerbosch which appeared on 1 June 1893. The authors, former sea captain Gerard van Deth and teacher Amos Johannes van Houten, painted a very black picture of the practices at the orphanage village and of Van 't Lindenhout's involvement. The media hype that resulted was so great that Johannes van 't Lindenhout himself suggested setting up a committee to investigate the matter. This investigation led to Van 't Lindenhout's name being cleared. Although the committee did recommend some improvements in the orphanage, Van 't Lindenhout ignored them for the most part. After all, the committee had been sympathetic towards him and mild in their judgment, which only served to strengthen his intractable nature. The whole affair, therefore, failed to make him sufficiently aware of the problems affecting the orphanage. One consequence of the Neerbosch Issue was that numbers in the institution began to decline until, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the population had stabilised at around 500 children.

Tradition and renewal

The creation of Neerbosch orphanage is in keeping with the tradition of caring for the poor in the Netherlands. Orphan care was an important component of this tradition. The daily routine at Neerbosch was in many ways similar to that in other city orphanages of the time. A continuous line of development in such orphanages is discernible from the end of the 16th century onwards. At the same time, Neerbosch orphanage was primarily a 19th-century initiative, made possible by increasing prosperity and the involvement of a civil society that was rapidly gaining in power. This tradition of rearing orphans and the changes related to education and parenting are described in chapters 2 and 3. The

social infrastructure that existed around this orphanage had much to do with the flourishing church societies and Christian organisations of the time. As far as Neerbosch is concerned, the orthodox Protestant Revival (Reveil) Movement played an important role, together with the rise of Methodism. The latter could be seen, for example, in the growth of the Free Evangelical Congregations (Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten). Van 't Lindenhout was closely involved in these developments, including the solidarity meetings that were organised in the Netherlands at the end of the 1870s, echoing the Brighton convention of 1875. One of these meetings was held in Neerbosch orphanage.

Van 't Lindenhout as central figure

The widespread public support for Neerbosch was due to the institution's favourable image cultivated by its charismatic founder and director, whose efforts in this direction were unstinting. He gave lectures throughout the country, often taking the Neerbosch choir and band with him. Such occasions motivated many people to dedicate time and effort to the orphanage. People were also motivated by the articles written – with a sense of drama – in products of the orphanage publishing house, such as the weekly newspaper *Het Oosten* and the *Orphans' Almanac*.

Van 't Lindenhout was a self-taught man, as can be seen in the biographical sketch of him in chapter 4. Through hard work and tactical decisions, he rose to great heights, although it would seem his success gradually ran away with him. He found it difficult to accept any criticism of his institution and only carried out major changes at Neerbosch if the law or people in authority amongst his adherents forced him to do so. For as long as possible, Van 't Lindenhout, his wife and his children (and their spouses, too) – all of whom figured prominently in running the orphanage – set their own course.

At the same time his ability to avoid conflict enabled him to play an important role within orthodox Protestant circles in the Netherlands, despite his limited education and the lack of a theological background. Because he remained a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and presented himself as an heir of the Revival, he was acceptable to the majority of Dutch orthodox Protestants. His sympathy for the Free Evangelicals and Seceders made him acceptable in those circles as well.

Van 't Lindenhout also avoided conflict in his dealings with his employees. Unfortunately that sometimes had disastrous results for the children. For example, he neglected to dismiss a teacher who had sexually abused an orphan girl, and he gave his personnel complete freedom in carrying out corporal punishment, which led to mistreatment. In fact, neither he nor the institution's Governing Board disapproved of corporate punishment as such. In other words, these orthodox Protestants were greatly at variance with the point of view – prevalent in the Netherlands at the time – that children should not be beaten.

Neerbosch adherents

In order to make his orphanage a success, Van 't Lindenhout exploited new developments in society, as becomes clear in chapter 5. An addition to the Nijmegen orphanage was built in polder country near the village of Neerbosch in 1867. This second location was later to expand into an 'orphanage village'. This expansion was stimulated by some clever moves on the part of Van 't Lindenhout. From the 1880s onwards he promoted Nijmegen – and with it the orphanage – as a tourist attraction. The increasing numbers of annual festi-

ties also played a role, as they gave him the opportunity to invite his adherents to visit the orphanage. And by publishing the Orphans' Almanac he took advantage of the current popularity of that type of reading material. What also helped was that the private publishing house at Neerbosch reflected amazingly well the trends in the expanding Dutch book market during the second half of the 19th century.

Van 't Lindenhout's efforts – which sometimes led to nervous exhaustion – were not the only reason Neerbosch was such a popular charity. Many people felt committed to the orphanage because they sympathised with the target group for which Neerbosch was intended: neglected orphans and semi-orphans. These orphans' misery fired their imagination more than did the residents of other institutions, such as the neglected boys at Nederlandsch Mettray. After all, it was not the fault of the children at Neerbosch that they had ended up in such miserable circumstances. This perception can be ascribed to the way Neerbosch was presented to the outside world, because, in fact, there was little difference between these children and the Nederlandsch Mettray boys, more than half of whom had also lost one or both parents.

The support for Neerbosch was particularly expressed in the time and effort that thousands of orthodox Protestants devoted to the orphanage. Many women made clothes and utensils for the orphanage in the 120 or more Christian women's associations all over the country. Rich families, including the nobility, donated considerable amounts, and preachers encouraged their flocks to collect smaller gifts. Thanks to this widespread support, the orphanage village profited much more from the rising prosperity and flourishing philanthropy than the old orphanages or new residential institutions in the country. Chapter 7 shows, in addition, that many children went to Neerbosch as a result of contacts made through its adherents

Pedagogical ideals

Van 't Lindenhout's pedagogical ideals leaned heavily on those of the orthodox protestant preacher, Ottho Gerhard Heldring, and of George Müller, a German-born missionary from Bristol. Chapter 6 describes Van 't Lindenhout's activities as an educator and reveals that he himself thought up few pedagogical innovations. He did deviate to a certain extent from traditional orphanage policy and that of his guiding light Heldring and source of inspiration Müller, but there are practical reasons for that. Examples include not having an orphan uniform – a custom in traditional orphanages – and the introduction of self-help in the training to be a servant; the girls formed a sort of self-directed team. Both solutions were, above all, cheaper for Neerbosch. Van 't Lindenhout's underpinning of such choices with pedagogical reasoning came afterwards.

The main aims of Neerbosch orphanage were providing a religious upbringing and making sure the children – often neglected – were re-educated and grew up properly. According to Van 't Lindenhout it was important to treat the children respectfully, consistently and with justice. He abided by traditional, Bible-based ideals of child-rearing for which pious virtues and the class society were the main reference points. At Neerbosch, therefore, children had to learn to accept their simple living conditions in order to prepare themselves for their future in the class society.

Van 't Lindenhout's idea to allow the orphanage to function as one big family was just as difficult to implement at Neerbosch as it was in traditional orphanages and the new resi-

dential institutions. There were too many children and too few staff to make this possible. Instead, the children were institutionalised, becoming used to life within the institution, where they exhibited the sort of socially desirable behaviour that was expected of them. Both children and staff were institutionalised, so when the children left the orphanage they sometimes had difficulty finding their way in Dutch society.

Neerbosch was located in the countryside. That distinguished it from traditional orphanages, but made it similar to new residential institutions such as Nederlandsch Mettray founded by Nutsman and the enlightened protestant philanthropist Willem Hendrik Suringar, and also Heldring's institution near Zetten. This choice of location, too, was for practical reasons: the orphanage in Nijmegen was too full and Van 't Lindenhout was offered some land outside the city in order to build a new orphanage. He later claimed that living in the countryside would help prevent the ruinous effects of urban life and would be favourable for the children's physical and mental health. This was an ideal that Van 't Lindenhout shared with his Protestant contemporaries.

Child-rearing climate

Van 't Lindenhout's wish to allow the children to grow up in a large family were hampered by another of his ideals, namely, the wish to keep expanding Neerbosch to form a much larger orphanage. He saw the progressive growth of the institution as God's will, partly because he believed the alternative – foster care – to be irresponsible. The larger the orphanage became, the more it would seem to the children like living in society, Van 't Lindenhout thought. That would be a better preparation for their further life outside Neerbosch. However, he turned a blind eye to the fact that the growth of Neerbosch only led to wrongs being committed.

The size of the orphanage village was one of the reasons the child-rearing climate differed from that of the enlightened Protestant Nederlandsch Mettray. Until 1880 child rearing in that agricultural commune had a strongly relational focus, with attention being paid to mildness, love and affection for the boys. It was easier to put that into practice there than at Neerbosch because the institution was smaller, and there were relatively more members of staff to care for fewer boys.

Another important difference in the child-rearing climate of the two institutions is that, in contrast to Neerbosch, the pedagogical approach at Nederlandsch Mettray had been worked out beforehand. The behaviour and progress made by the youngsters there were registered carefully so that the management could check the effects of re-education. Van 't Lindenhout, on the other hand, worked intuitively rather than pedagogically, did not maintain any case files and did not evaluate the children's developments consistently. His rules were more flexible, although he did, like Suringar and Heldring, attach importance to order, discipline and regular habits. At Neerbosch the children appear to have had a somewhat more relaxed daily routine.

The child-rearing climate at Neerbosch was strongly determined by the fact that boys and girls lived together. This was the big difference between the orphanage village and the other two institutions, the boys-only Nederlandsch Mettray and Heldring's girls-only orphanage in Zetten. Co-education – described in chapter 7 – involved the acceptance of strict behavioural rules, but gave the boys and girls at Neerbosch more mutual contact than in traditional orphanages.

Life at Neerbosch

Despite differences resulting from the size of the orphanage village, its regime and the mixed population, the daily routine there nevertheless appeared to be comparable in many ways to that in traditional orphanages. However, chapters 8 and 9 demonstrate that life at Neerbosch clearly sets itself apart in its more conservative type of orthodox Protestantism, influenced by the Revival and by Methodism. This could be seen, for example in the music and religious education lessons. Apart from educational matters, the orthodox Protestant character of Neerbosch orphanage was evident in other differences, such as Sunday church services, prayer meetings, catechism and meetings of associations of 'young men' and of 'young daughters'. Van 't Lindenhout regarded Neerbosch as a missionary instrument to be used to influence both the children and the outside world. In other words, this way of organising the daily routine of child-rearing at Neerbosch bears the orthodox Protestant stamp.

From the 1880s onwards Neerbosch became over-populated and this led to a deterioration in the hygiene. This explains why, early in the 1890s, the numbers of cases of TB increased greatly and why in 1892 there was an outbreak of typhus. These circumstances resulted in a higher death rate than in previous years, in which the death rate had been approximately the same as the national average. Death among children aged 1 to 5 years at Neerbosch was lower than the national average but that amongst the 5- to 20-year-olds was much higher, the reason being that many children who arrived at Neerbosch after their fifth year were already ill and in too bad a condition to be cured. Chapter 8, which deals with caring for the sick at Neerbosch, describes how children arriving at the orphanage were often already infected with the tuberculosis bacterium, especially those between the ages of 4 and 8 years.

Education and child-rearing in the orphanage

From 1880 onwards, education at the Neerbosch nursery school lagged behind that of the innovative Froebel education that was gaining ground in the rest of the country. The elementary school, on the other hand, improved after Barend van der Schuur was appointed as head teacher in 1876. He introduced widely used teaching methods such as the arithmetic books by Boeser and Hentschel-Rijkens's mental arithmetic method. Education in the elementary school was adapted to commonly accepted methods and it met legislative requirements. Nevertheless, the educational quality dropped once again at the end of the 1880s and start of the 1890s because the classes were larger than was allowed by law.

Once the girls reached the age of around ten, they were put to work on domestic duties. That was earlier than in other institutions. Although the servant's training at Neerbosch lasted a long time, its level remained low partly because the girls were trained by former Neerbosch orphan girls, whose own education had been very limited. In addition, Neerbosch was growing so fast that the rotating self-help system no longer functioned properly, which meant that not every girl learned all the skills she needed for earning her living as a servant outside Neerbosch.

The quality of teaching a trade to the boys at Neerbosch mostly seemed to be reasonable or even good. A wider range of vocational training was offered here than in the other rural residential institutions. But the boys in city orphanages could choose from even more

types of training. Chapter 9 shows that the working conditions for the Neerbosch youths did not appear to be too tough by nineteenth-century standards. One exception was the conditions of work at the printer's, as chapter 10 illustrates. Here, the strict protestant educational ideals were sometimes suppressed so as to be able to compete with private printing companies.

Departure

After completing their training, the boys and girls departed from Neerbosch when Van 't Lindenhout or his wife had found them a suitable position. Chapter 11 sets out how the children were often given their first job with an employer within the group of Neerbosch adherents living in the '*protestantenband*': the regions of the Netherlands where a large percentage of the population consisted of orthodox Protestants. This demonstrates yet again the importance of the social network within which Neerbosch functioned. Choosing such employers was a conscious policy; the children should have as little direct contact as possible with large cities, Van 't Lindenhout believed. In order to find work for his boys he also contacted supporters in the United States. That was one reason he travelled there in 1886, at a time when employment opportunities for orphans in the Netherlands was declining due to an economic crisis. The result of his efforts was that during his directorship more than 100 Neerbosch orphans emigrated to the United States.

Not all children left Neerbosch only once their education had been completed. Some left earlier, going back to their legal guardians or families, while a few were fostered. However, from 1893 onwards, the Neerbosch Issue caused many more children to be removed from Neerbosch ahead of time by their families and guardians. Also, more children ran away from the orphanage village than in previous decades. This trend re-emerged after the death of a semi-orphan, Johan Tiecken, in 1899. Between 1893 and 1903, nearly a quarter of the children left Neerbosch prematurely.

The premature departure of many children and the shrinkage that took place in the orphanage after 1893 exacerbated the financial problems affecting the institution as a result of the Neerbosch Issue. In the same period, the Neerbosch Issue and the death of Tiecken influenced national discussions on reviewing 'poor relief' and, indirectly, helped to bring in the Children's Act of 1901. The Epilogue reveals how, at the time of the issue of Tiecken's death, the Board at Neerbosch was more critical than it had been during the Neerbosch Issue six years earlier. The criticism directed at Van 't Lindenhout and his family led to a crisis of confidence amongst Board members at Neerbosch from 1900 onwards. This crisis eventually led to Van 't Lindenhout laying down his function as director of Neerbosch.